

The road out towards Mertzon cemetery passes over Bank Hill and Stu Evans Hill. The cemetery itself is on the old Evans place; landscaping, except for some imported cedar trees, is mainly native grasses.

In May we buried one of my partners there who grew up on this ranch. He and I spent our summers and holidays riding the older horses and coming as close as we could to being grown men.

The country was plush and fully stocked. The Big Depression was on, and out on the ranches things like battery radios and hand cranked ice cream freezers were among the few luxuries.

At the funeral an organist played and a lady sang a hymn, I think. My mind wandered back to one Christmas season when he and I drove a herd of old thin cows and baby calves about 15 miles across country, over a big flat plateau to another ranch.

Insulated clothes hadn't been heard of in those days. The weather was wet and grey and on the verge of turning to sleet. We'd stuffed salt sacks down our collars and tied bandannas over our hats. When we reached the first gate going out of our place, as he trotted up to open it, I saw that his feet were bare in the stirrups...

A member of his family walking up to the front of the church brought me back to real time. Without any flourish, she put his hat on his chest. It wasn't the same hat that he and I found down on Devils River Draw that the grasshoppers had about eaten, a hat that'd been lost too long.

The preacher said some things, and the next thing I knew we were riding over those hills I told you about. I clinched up my eyes real tight and hoped he was going to an easy place.

The winter sun goes down real fast in the Shortgrass Country. The edge of a stirrup starts to bear down on whichever side of your boot it's hitting. But to this day I can't imagine how cold it must have been riding that far barefooted.